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PRESS RELEASE

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A Partnership to Promote a Safe July 4th Holiday Season

Wayne County Executive Robert A. Ficano's Consumer Protection Task Force is initiating a partnership with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), Saint Mary's Hospital, in Livonia, and the University of Michigan Burn Center to call upon the public to practice fireworks safety in order to ensure that the July 4 holiday season is a celebration and not a tragedy.

"The American flag, parades, and fireworks are all part of our tradition and celebration of independence during the July 4th holiday," said Wayne County Executive Robert A. Ficano. He encourages residents to enjoy the holiday and the tradition of fireworks activities by letting the professionals put on the displays. "There will be many fireworks displays across Wayne County and Michigan. Rather than risk the chance of an accident and serious injury to family and friends, just sit back and enjoy the show."

There are 19 large fireworks events scheduled in Wayne County over the next two weeks, including the Marshall Field - Target display set for Wednesday over the Detroit River. The display is the largest such show in North America.

While most local residents will enjoy safe and spectacular fireworks displays, large numbers of Wayne County residents are injured each year, often when using illegal fireworks. Many suffer serious burns and injuries.

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Michigan residents often don't know which fireworks are illegal and which can be sold and used. The Michigan Penal Code (Fireworks Law - Act 328, P.A. 1931, As Amended) states that it is illegal to sell, possess, transport, or use fireworks in Michigan without a permit. Devices that are legal in the State of Michigan include flat paper caps, toy trick noisemakers, flitter sparklers, fountains, and toy snakes.

"What most Michigan residents do not realize is that devices which make a loud bang, leave the ground, spin or twirl are prohibited under State law and can be unsafe," states Wayne County Executive Robert A. Ficano.

Illegal under Federal law are explosive devices with street names like "M-80" and "quarter stick." These devices resemble large firecrackers but they are actually unstable small bombs. Typically, they are cardboard tubes fitted with fuses and packed with explosive materials. Tubes are one to six inches long and a half-inch to an inch or more in diameter. Common colors are red, silver and brown. Prices range from approximately \$1 each to whatever the traffic will bear. ATF Special Agent in Charge Valerie J. Goddard stresses that ATF regards "counterfeit fireworks" as totally unpredictable. "They may seem innocent but they can go off in your face," she warns. These illegal devices are extremely dangerous, meet no safety standards, and can accidentally detonate due to heat, shock or pressure.

Also, Congress passed the Safe Explosives Act of 2003, strengthening existing Federal explosives laws and regulations by making it mandatory for individuals, organizations, and companies to hold a permit or license with ATF when manufacturing, dealing or receiving commercial grade display fireworks. Thorough background checks are conducted on all applicants when seeking these permits or licenses.

"The bottom line is that if you either make or sell illegal M-80 type explosive devices or are in receipt of commercial grade display fireworks without a Federal permit or license, you could be subject to federal felonies of up to 10 years imprisonment, \$250,000 fines, and/or both," stresses SAC Goddard.

The public is urged to help expose individuals who make and sell the illegal M-80 type explosive devices as well as any illegal sales or receipt of commercial display fireworks by calling the **ATF hotline at 1-888-ATF-BOMB (or 1-888-283-2662).**

Illegal devices -- from the smallest "M-80" to the largest "quarter stick" -- have maimed and killed young children as well as adults. According to statistics from the Consumer Product Safety Commission, between 8,000 and 10,000 people annually suffer injuries associated with fireworks. More than half of these injuries are burns and most of the injuries involve the hands, eyes and head. About half of the victims are under 15 years of age.

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